

Amendments to the Claims:

The following listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1-6. (Canceled)

7. (Original) A method for implementing a raster image path architecture, comprising the steps of:

(1) capturing a source image so as to provide device-independent grayscale image data;

(2) generating associated segmentation information useful for optimal rendering of the device-independent grayscale image data as binary image data;

(3) applying the associated segmentation information to create device-independent N-plane MRC image data;

(4) determining a target print engine having a print controller and determining whether the print controller can effectively process the device-independent N-plane MRC image data;

(5) in response to a determination that the print controller is capable of effectively processing the device-independent N-plane MRC image data, submitting the N-plane MRC image data to the print controller; and

(6) in response to determination that the print controller is not capable of effectively processing the device-independent N-plane MRC image data, rendering grayscale overlay planes and flattening image layers, thus yielding device-dependent binary raster image data and submitting the device-dependent binary raster image file to the print controller.

8. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein the N-plane MRC image file further comprises a plurality of planes for supporting binary images and a plurality of planes for supporting a grayscale images.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7, further comprising the step of storing the device-independent N-plane MRC raster image file.

10-11. (Canceled)